

## **Groups in Context: A Model of Group Effectiveness**

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### **Abstract**

The primary aim of this paper is to determine the factors influencing group effectiveness in student-based groups. This study also develops a model of group effectiveness based on literature reviews of organizational work teams and group effectiveness. Qualitative research methods, interviews and document review, were employed to achieve the objectives of this study. The framework integrates two sets of factors influencing group effectiveness: group structure and individual characteristics. The model fills a gap in the group effectiveness literature review by developing research propositions that take into account different theoretical perspectives to study group effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Group effectiveness, Facilitator, Work team, Task

### **1. Introduction**

Given the increased demand for group works, it has been argued that strong facilitation skills will be critical for successful group interactions. A number of researchers and practitioners suggest two possible pathways to improve group effectiveness. First, the enhancement of group facilitation and coordination skills, and second the use of appropriate computer-based technology to support teams (Chilberg, 1989).

Group effectiveness is viewed as a set of dynamic functions carried out before, during, and after workshops or training sessions to help the group collaboratively achieve its outcomes/tasks. The use of facilitators is often an effective way for organizations to improve the internal functioning and performance outcomes teams (Schwarz, 1994). Facilitators can help organizational groups focus on the task at hand, point out group process issues that may impede progress and, in general, keep things moving forward toward the desired goal.

As important as it is, facilitator is a person who is either given a role formally or takes on a role informally monitoring a team's process for effectiveness. The facilitator focuses more on how a team is working than on what the team is doing. The responsibilities of a facilitator vary from team to team, depending on the goals, technical requirements, duration, and participants' makeup of that team. Participants, who have worked on teams before, or who have been working with one team for a long time, may require less facilitation than would members of a newly formed team (Clawson and Bostrom, 1995). In general, facilitators attend to such team processes as communication, meeting management, decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution.

However, organizational work teams have become an almost inevitable facet of organizational life. With increasing regularity, work teams are being asked to perform a wide array of crucial organizational functions, and they are becoming a critical structural unit of many organizations.

According to the importance of work teams in every organization, facilitators help team members work cohesively and cooperatively to effectively achieve organizational and individual goals. Through the use of facilitation, teams will function more effectively, members will be more satisfied with the team experience and learn new skills, and output will be enhanced.

Facilitators often play numerous roles in organizational communication. One of the roles of a facilitator is to help work team members achieve predetermined objectives. With regard to this role, facilitators enable members to provide information and communicate with each other. However, the purpose of this article is to propose a model of group effectiveness that can explain the different factors influencing effectiveness.

## **2. Literature Review**

Several theoretical discussions have been presented about task-group effectiveness. Bettenhausen's (1991) review of the sociological, psychological, and management literature reviewed a number of important models dealing with the effectiveness of work groups. Similarly, Levine and Moreland's (1990) reveal the psychology literature which also points to the models of group effectiveness. Gladstein (1984) proposed a comprehensive model of group effectiveness. In this model group effectiveness is viewed as the major output of small group behavior. Effectiveness has three components: group performance, satisfaction of group-member needs, and the ability of the group to exist over time (Hackman and Morris, 1975). His model, which is based on an early McGrath (1964) model, predicts that group process leads to effectiveness. Group process is the intragroup and intergroup actions that transform resources into a product. Process behaviors are either maintenance behaviors that build, strengthen and regulate group life or task behaviors that enable the group to solve the objective problem to which the group is committed (Gladstein, 1984).

Gladstein suggested that group ratings of open communication, supportiveness, active leadership, training, and experience in the organization were all positively associated with group ratings of satisfaction and performance.

With a focus on leadership, one of the most frequently cited models of group effectiveness is offered by Hersey and Blanchard (1988). This model equates group progress and effectiveness with group maturity. According to their model, group maturity is a continuous variable that is influenced by two factors: ability and willingness. Ability is defined as the knowledge, experience, and skill that an individual or group brings to a particular task or activity. Members of mature groups, unlike those of immature groups, process the ability to perform their tasks without much direction, assistance, or direct supervision. Willingness refers to the extent to which an individual or group has the confidence, commitment, and motivation to accomplish a specific task. Members of mature groups do not require extensive encouragement or pushing to work on their tasks.

Hersey and Blanchard's theory suggested that mature groups are likely to be more effective than immature ones, because an immature group is highly dependent on its leader. Members of immature groups are unable or unwilling to take responsibility for completing tasks without the assistance of their leaders. On the other hand, mature groups are able to function independent of their leaders. In short, Hersey and Blanchard state that the ability and motivational levels of a group are the key determinants of group effectiveness.

The role of the organizational context is more fully integrated within a model of organizational group effectiveness proposed by Hackman (1990). Hackman begins by identifying three primary determinants of work team effectiveness: (1) the amount of effort group members put forth in accomplishing the group's task, (2) the amount of knowledge and skills group members bring to the task, (3) the appropriateness of the task performance strategies employed by the group in

accomplishing its task. According to Hackman, the performance of an organizational work team is likely to be effective if its members are highly motivated and thus put forth considerable effort in accomplishing the group's task; if its members have the necessary skills and knowledge to work on the task; and if the steps and procedures that the group employs in completing its task actually facilitate the group's efforts.

In addition, Hackman identifies three organizational conditions that increase the likelihood that a group's work will be characterized by sufficient effort, adequate task-relevant knowledge and skill, and task-appropriate performance strategies. There are: (1) a group structure that promotes competent work on the task, (2) an organizational context that supports and reinforces excellence, and (3) available, expert coaching and process assistance.

The first refers to task clarity, group composition, and core norms. The second includes the organization's reward, educational, and informational systems. The third points out that organization should not expect individuals to already know how to work in groups, but should provide them with adequate resources to learn these skills.

### **3. Research Methods**

The purpose of interviewing in this study was to obtain the students' perception about group effectiveness in the context of finishing school program. Specially, study's aim in investigating students' perception is to obtain the factors which influence their group effectiveness.

In terms of the size of the sample, Saunders *et al.* (1997) argued that a quantitative method needs a large sample of respondents; in contrast, qualitative method requires a small number of informants. Thus a series of interviews were conducted with 7 final year students who participated in finishing school program in Universiti Putra Malaysia. We attempted that the selected participants in this study were not related to one another. The rationale for using those who were not in relationship with each other was the belief that more ideas would be generated in the groups of students who did not know each other. It was thought the participants might feel inhibited if they were interviewed among and about their acquaintances, which might result in a lower quantity of information.

All participants were interviewed face to face individually using a semi-structure format, using question schedule. The interviews focused on the students' perception about facilitators' skills, duration of sessions, support aids, facilitators' experience and other factors which influence their group effectiveness.

The interviews lasted 30 minutes on average, whereas some were lengthier. The questions of semi-structural interviews were developed before the study started. In total we interviewed 7 participants. We used tape-recorder for interviews and then transcribed them. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) explain, analysis begins as soon as the first piece of data collected in qualitative research. The participants' transcriptions have been read entirely multiple times and interpreted focusing on the stated aims of the study.

### **4. Findings**

The respondent in this study (N=7) were obtained from final year bachelor students who took part in finishing school program. These courses are student-friendly and handled by skillful facilitators. The participants are required to communicate through brainstorming sessions, discussions, meetings and talks. The evaluation will be based on four mechanisms, i.e. attendance, involvement discipline, presentation and writing assignments.

Generally, most students extremely emphasize that facilitator is the main factor which influence their group effectiveness. They mentioned that the ability, knowledge, communication skills of facilitator, being friendly, making more eye contact, being open minded are the essential characteristics

of a good facilitator. The entire female participants preferred to have a male facilitator and male students had no comment in this regard.

The majority of the interviewed students agreed with computer, internet and handout as the best support aids. Regarding to the factors affected their group effectiveness during the sessions, they mentioned that group composition and the environment which groups operate in are the most influential factors.

They also disclosed that two-way communication and interaction among group members and also the facilitator can affect and improve group effectiveness to accomplish their tasks. Giving real examples of workplace, paying attention to student's comment by facilitator, outdoor activities were other aspects which have been stated by all participants as factors affect their group effectiveness.

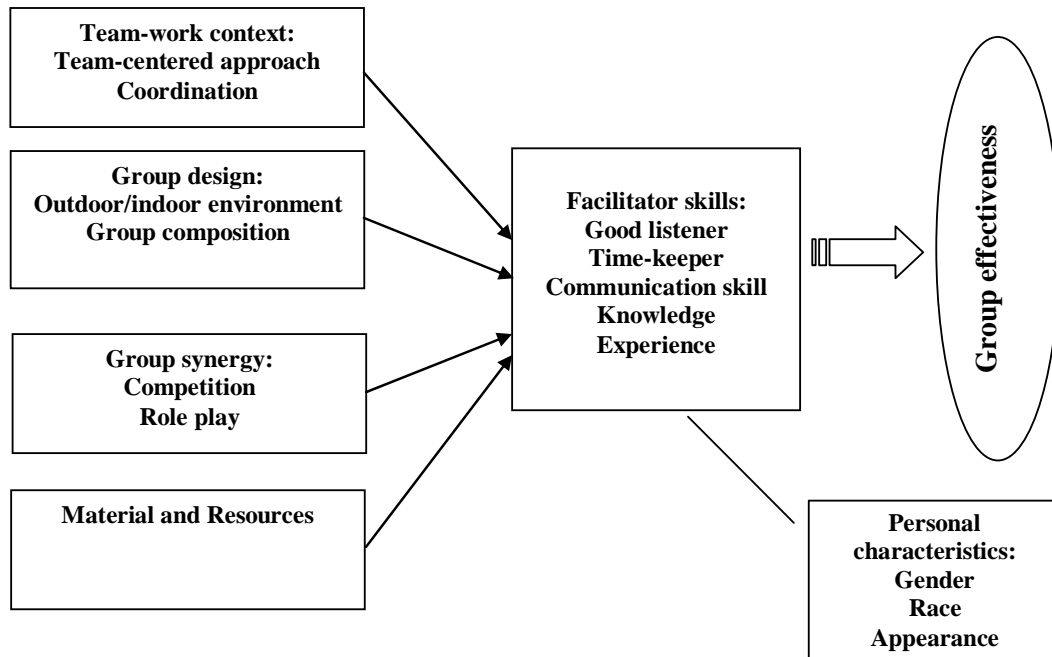
## **5. Integrated Model of Group Effectiveness**

By combining Gladstein's (1984) notion of group structure, Hersey and Blanchard's (1988) characteristics of group maturity, and Hackman's (1990) assistance of an expert coach and also the results of this study, we can identify two sets of factors that collectively influence group effectiveness. The first include the group structure which influences group effectiveness; namely team-work context, group design, group synergy. The group structure is supplemented by materials and resources which are available for group members to accomplish their tasks. The second factor which influences group effectiveness is the role of facilitator in group process. These two sets of influences on group effectiveness are summarized in Figure 1.

The interrelationship among the various components of this integrated model yields several general propositions:

1. The effectiveness of a work group is determined by the ability, knowledge, experience, and communication skills of facilitator, as mediated by the personal characteristics which includes appearance, gender, and race. The model suggests that a work group is likely to perform well if its facilitator is very knowledgeable and skillful with regard to the task at hand, make a great effort in guiding the group members, is a good listener and have good communication skills to convey the necessary notions and prerequisites for successfully completing the task.
2. The ability of group members is facilitated by team-work context. The model suggests that the amount of working mutually a work group members possess is a result of the group maturity. It is proposed that coordination and working interdependent among group members would probably increase group effectiveness.
3. The design employed by a group in completing its task assures positive interaction among group members. The model indicates that the group composition and the environment which groups operate in to complete their task influence the group effectiveness partially.

**Figure 1:** A re-conceptualized model of group effectiveness



4. The model proposes that group synergy is one of the determinants of group effectiveness. The amount of cooperative interaction and effort group members are willing to exert to complete their task creates greater group effectiveness. According to the model, group synergy can be achieved by giving role-play to members and competition among group members also has its good point in keeping group members cooperative.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has proposed the theoretical approach to group effectiveness to fill gap between theory and practice. There are several conclusions that can be made with regard to this theoretical approach. First, it should be considered that no strategy will work equally well for different teams, and teams will create their own reality. Second, this model is a combination of individual, group, and environmental characteristics which influence the group effectiveness. Third, the proposed model is comprehensive in that it includes variables from different levels of analysis.

For future research, it is highly recommended that the constructs of the model drawn should be quantitatively and qualitatively tested and evaluated with regard to group effectiveness in different work teams which have different characteristics and properties. Finally, it will be useful to identify the inhibitors of group effectiveness in addition to facilitation factors.

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